

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3916

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

CINCLANT NORVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 0426

CINCLANT FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, JM

SUBJ: PAROCHIAL ELECTIONS

REF: KINGSTON 394

1. ON THE BASIS OF AS YET INCOMPLETE RETURNS, THE PEOPLES NATIONAL PARTY (PNP) OF PRIME MINISTER MICHAEL MANLEY IS HEADED FOR A MAJOR ELECTION VICTORY IN YESTERDAY'S PARISH COUNCIL ELECTIONS IN WHICH 256 SEATS WERE AT STAKE. THE PNP HAS SO FAR CAPTURED CONTROL OF ELEVEN OF THE ISLAND'S THIRTEEN PARISH COUNCILS AS OPPOSED TO SEVEN BEFORE THE ELECTION. THE PNP WAS PREDICTABLY STRONG IN THE KINGSTON/ST. ANDREW RACE WHERE IT TOOK 33 SEATS TO THE JLP'S FOUR. IT DID NEARLY AS WELL IN THE OTHER MAJOR POPULATION CENTER OF ST. JAMES (MONTEGO BAY), TAKING 14 OF THE 20 SEATS AT STAKE. ONLY IN THE PARISHES OF CLARENDON, FROM WHICH THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION COMES, AND ST. THOMAS WHERE MP ROBERT LIGHTBOURNE'S INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES DID WELL, DID THE PNP FAIL TO GAIN CONTROL. PRELIMINARY ESTMATES ARE THAT LESS
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THAN 50 PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS TURNED OUT.

2. COMMENT: THOUGH MANLEY WILL REGARD THE ELECTION VICTORY AS A VINDICATION OF HIS DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES, INCLUDING THE DECISION TO ANNOUNCE MAJOR AUSTERITY MEASURES IN THE MIDST OF THE CAMPAIGN, AND A MANDATE FOR THE FUTURE, THE RESULT IS AT LEAST AS MUCH DUE TO THE FAILURE OF THE OPPOSITION TO MOUNT A MAJOR EFFORT IN THE CAMPAIGN. IT IS ALSO A RESULT OF THE MAJOR REORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT THE PNP MADE IN RURAL JAMAICA IN 1972. PNP ADS IN THE LOCAL PRESS OUTNUMBERED THOSE OF THE JLP CANDIDATES BY TWO OR THREE TIMES, AS DID SPOT ANNOUNCEMENTS ON THE RADIO. FINANCES WERE A MAJOR PROBLEM FOR THE JLP, BUTH THIS WAS DUE AS MUCH TO DISORGANIZATION, DIVIDED LEADERSHIP AND DEMORILIZATION AS TO OTHER FACTORS. IF THE PARTY HAD BEEN ABLE TO PRESENT A UNITED IMAGE BEHIND VIGOROUS LEADERSHIP, THE FUNDS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY IS WILLING.

3. THE LIGHT TURNOUT PROBABLY FAVORED THE PNP BECAUSE OF ITS ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH AND CONSEQUENT ABILITY TO GET THE VOTE OUT. IT MAY ALSO HAVE DEMONSTRATED THAT WHILE PEOPLE MAY BE DISSATISFIED WITH THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY THEY ARE NOT THAT DISSATISFIED.

4. THE LONGER RANGE IMPLICATIONS OF THE POOR PERFORMANCE OF THE JLP WILL NOT BE CLEAR FOR SOME TIME. HOWEVER, IT IS CLEAR THAT HUGH SHEARER HAS FAILED AGAIN AS A LEADER AT ELECTION TIME. THE SHOCK OF DEFEAT COULD PROD THE JLP INTO A MAJOR LEADERSHIP REORGANIZATION AND THUS, IN THE LONG RUN, HAVE A BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON JAMAICA'S TWO-PARTY SYSTEM. WITH SHEARER FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF THE BITU, HOWEVER, AND NO OTHER POTENTIAL LEADERS IN SIGHT, THIS IS LIKELY TO BE A SLOW PROCESS. LIGHTBOURNE WILL NO DOUBT POINT TO HIS SUCCESS AS AN INDICATION OF BOTH SOLID VOTER APPEAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY, AND SUGGEST THAT HE IS THE LOGICAL ALTERNATIVE TO SHEARER AS LEADER OF THE JLP, OR THAT A NEW PARTY BUILT AROUND HIM IS A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE JLP ITSELF. IN THE MEANTIME, MANLEY AND HIS CLOSEST SUPPORTERS WILL BE EVEN MORE CONVINCED OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THEIR CAUSE.
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